

PRATHAM BOOKS
A Book in Every Child's Hand

Three for Free - A Folktale from Taiwan

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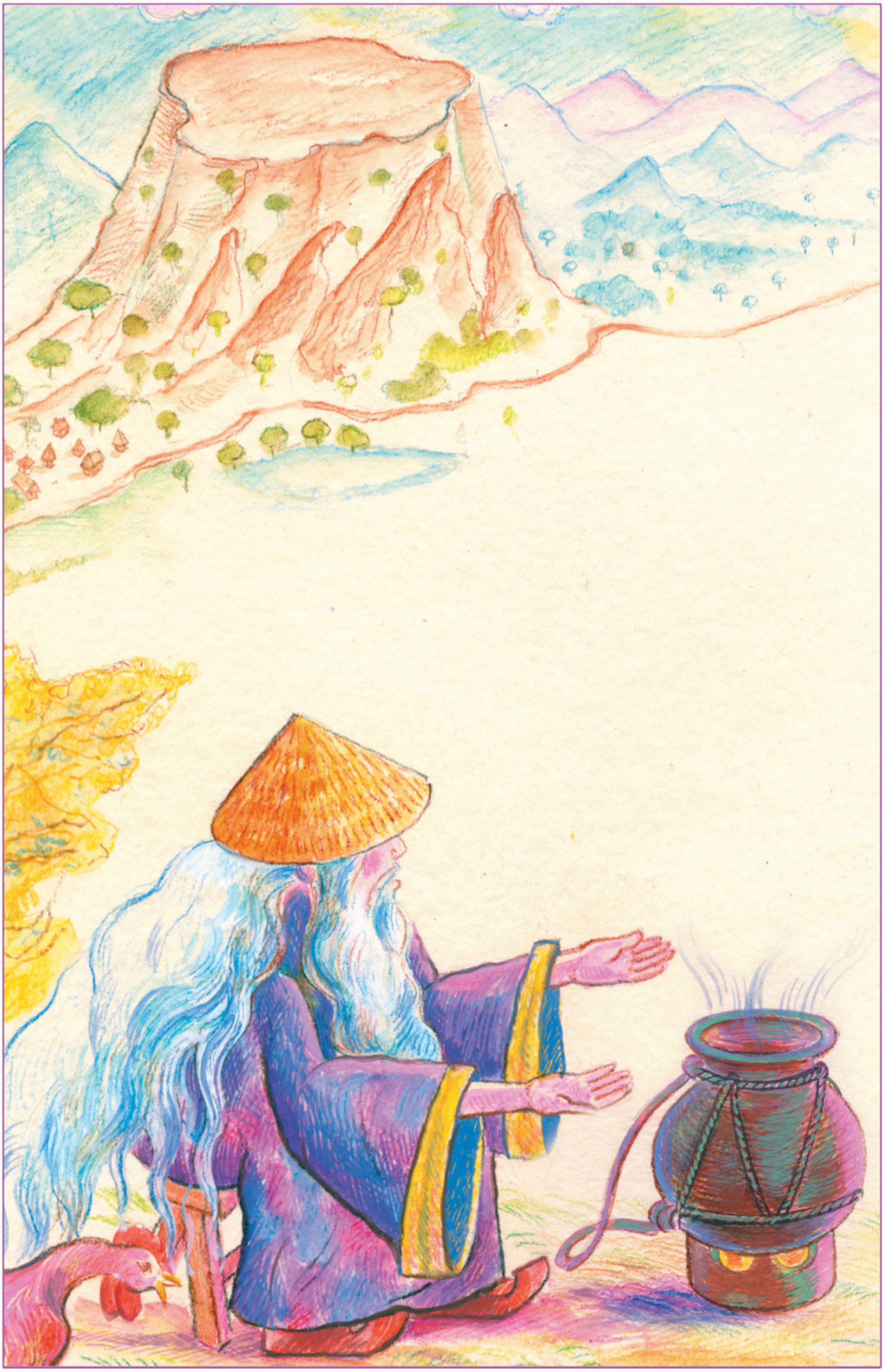
Level 3

In Kaohsiung in southern Taiwan, there is a mountain called Ban Pin Shan, meaning ‘one half’. Strange name for an ordinary mountain, you might think.

But take one look at it and you will see why it is called so. It looks like one half of the mountain is missing! Almost as if someone has cut off the top neatly, with a big sword. Before you start to wonder how it got its name, let me tell you the legend behind it.

Long, long ago, when Ban Pin Shan was still a whole mountain, there used to be a village near it. One day, a very old man came to the village carrying a huge pot on his head.

His hair was white as snow, and so was his beard. His face was wrinkled like the old, worn-out clothes he wore. He set the pot down in the village square and opened the lid.



The sweet smell of fresh dumplings filled the air.

“Hot dumplings! Fresh, hot dumplings!” he yelled. “One for one cent, two for two cents and three, for FREE!”

Villagers passing by became curious and crowded around this foolish man who was giving away dumplings that looked inviting and smelt absolutely delicious.

“One for one cent, two for two cents and three, for FREE!” yelled the old man again. “Red beans and sesame, and three for free.”

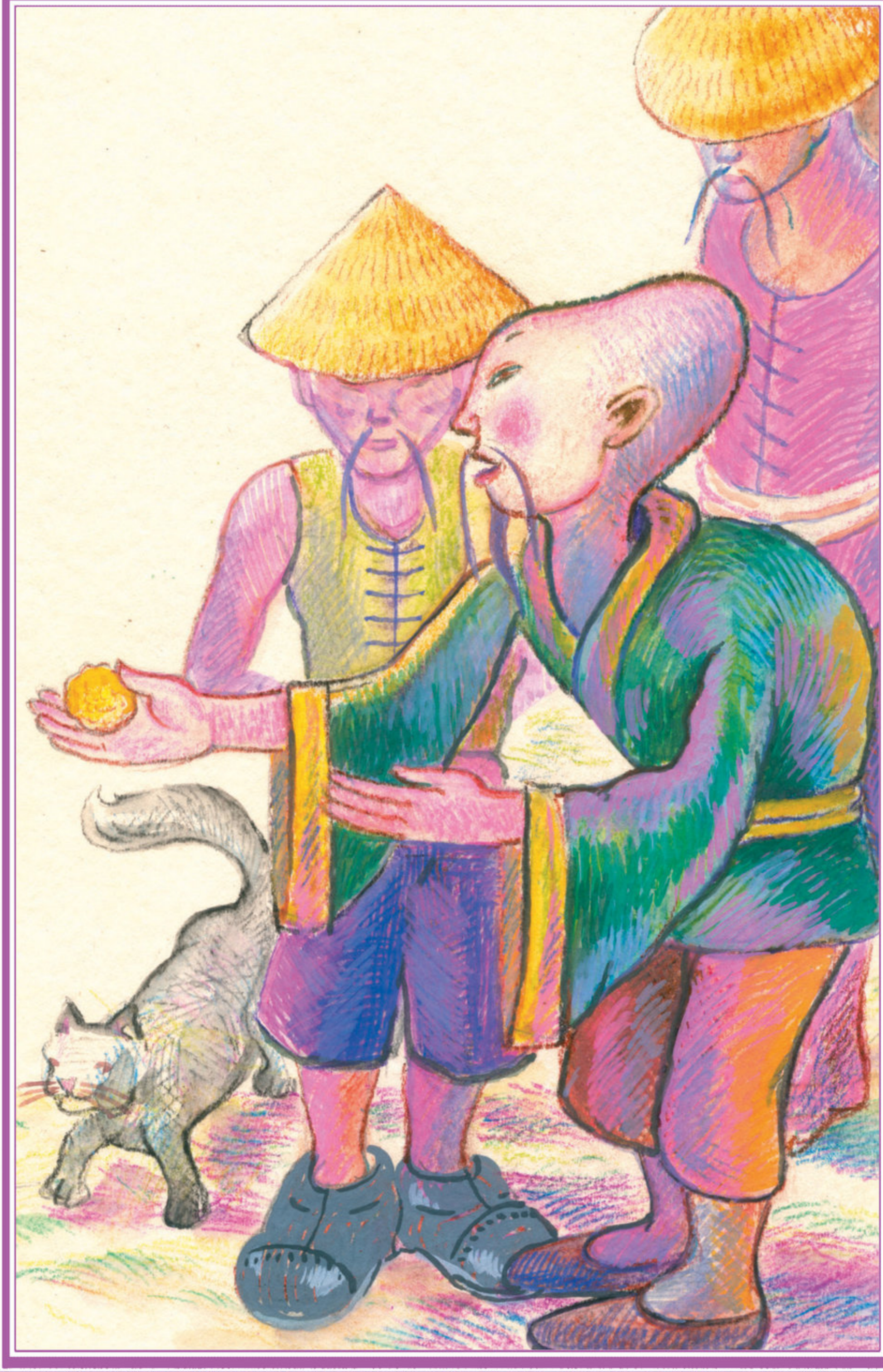
The villagers who had gathered around the old man began whispering to each other. “Must be a trick! Three dumplings for free? How can that be?” they said.

“The most delicious ones, Sir,” said the old man as he handed the first one to Big-Head Wang.

It was as big as an egg. Big-Head Wang popped it into his mouth and went mmmm…. Everyone could see that he was really enjoying the dumpling.

By the time he finished the second one, his stomach was full. But he looked at the old man and said, “If I eat the third one, I don’t have to pay. It is not a lie, right?” He wanted to make sure the old man had meant what he said.

“Three for free and that it will be!” said the old man, handing Big-Head Wang the third dumpling, which he promptly stuffed into his mouth. If he could eat it, he wouldn’t have to pay anything.



The old man kept his word and Big-Head Wang went away happy, his stomach full to bursting.

Soon, everyone wanted three dumplings each. Not a single villager ordered one or two dumplings; everyone wanted only three for free. In a while, the whole pot was wiped clean. Some of the villagers were disappointed as the old man prepared to leave.

“My, my, don’t all of you have good appetites,” the old man said as he heaved the empty pot over his head and walked away.

Suddenly, Eagle-Eye Chan, who had just gulped down three free dumplings, cried out, “Look! A part of the mountain is missing!”

“Nonsense!” said the villagers. “Too many dumplings in your tummy have made you think funny!” All of them laughed at Eagle-Eye Chan, who kept staring at the mountain long after the villagers had left.

That evening, everyone was talking about the old man and his delicious dumplings. “He must be a really stupid man to give away three for free!” they said, laughing. “Let’s hope he comes every day.”

The next morning, the old man arrived again, carrying his pot of dumplings. He set the pot down again in the village square.

“One for one cent, two for two cents and three, for FREE!” he yelled. “Peanuts and sesame, and three for free.”

This time, the pot was emptied an hour earlier than the previous day. The villagers had eaten up all the dumplings, three apiece. And for free. Quietly, the old man heaved the pot over his head and left, smiling a strange smile.

On the third day, the old man came again. This time, the villagers were waiting for the stupid old man to arrive. Soon, they were trying to eat as many dumplings as possible, for free.

Suddenly, a voice said, “Mister, can I have one dumpling, please?”

Everyone froze! Their mouths hung open with bits of dumpling falling out, as they tried to catch sight of whoever had uttered the words.



Now, which idiot would want to pay for ONE dumpling when he could have THREE for FREE? There was pin-drop silence. They saw a young man with a soft face standing in the middle of the crowd, a single cent in his outstretched hand.

The old man spoke. “Young man, didn’t you hear me?” he said. “One for one cent, two for two cents and three, for FREE!”

“Yes, I did,” said the young man in a sincere voice. “But I’ve seen how you’ve carried this huge pot every day, giving away your dumplings, three for free.

You have not made any money in the last few days and I feel sorry for you. I want to help, but I have only enough money to pay for one dumpling.”

When the villagers heard the young man, their hearts were filled with shame. They hung their heads in silence.

The old man stepped towards the young man and embraced him. “Ha! At last I’ve found you!” he cried. “I am the mountain god and I choose you to be my pupil. I will teach you all the magic that I know,” he said, as tears flowed down his old, wrinkled face.

The villagers quickly realized that the mountain god had disguised himself as this old man to test them. And to find a kind-hearted soul who could become his pupil.

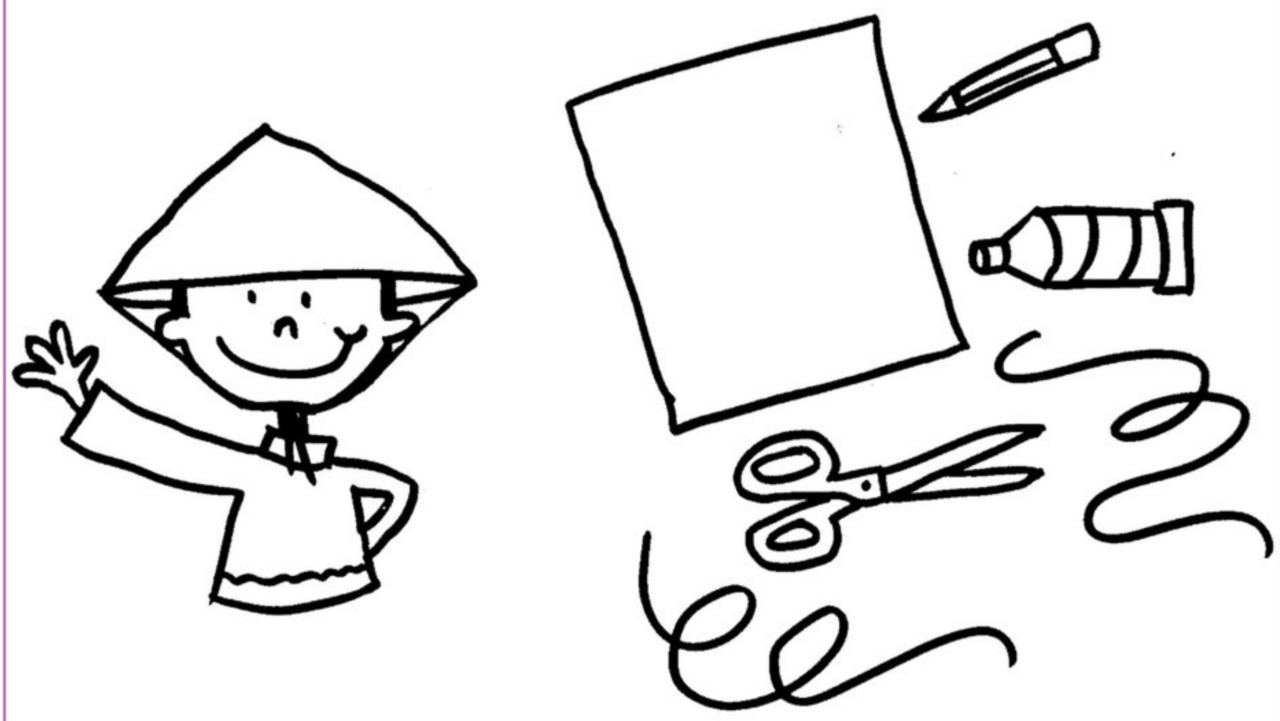
Then, the mountain god revealed to the utter shock of everyone present that the dumplings they had been eating weren’t real dumplings.
They were made from the mud that he had dug out from the mountain.



As soon as the villagers heard this, they ran to see the leftover dumplings in the pot. But all they saw was a pot full of mud! And when they turned to look at the mountain, they couldn’t believe their eyes! There was only half of it left standing! Just as Eagle-Eye Chan had said. But they had been too greedy to listen….

Soon, the mountain god took his young disciple with him to the mountain to teach him the magic of the gods. As for the villagers, their hearts were filled with remorse and they cursed themselves for being so greedy. They named the mountain Ban Pin Sghan – a name that stands to this day – and vowed to be less greedy.

Now tell me, if an old man came to your town selling delicious dumplings, “One for one cent, two for two cents and three, for FREE!” – how many would you buy?



PAPER PIZZAZZ!

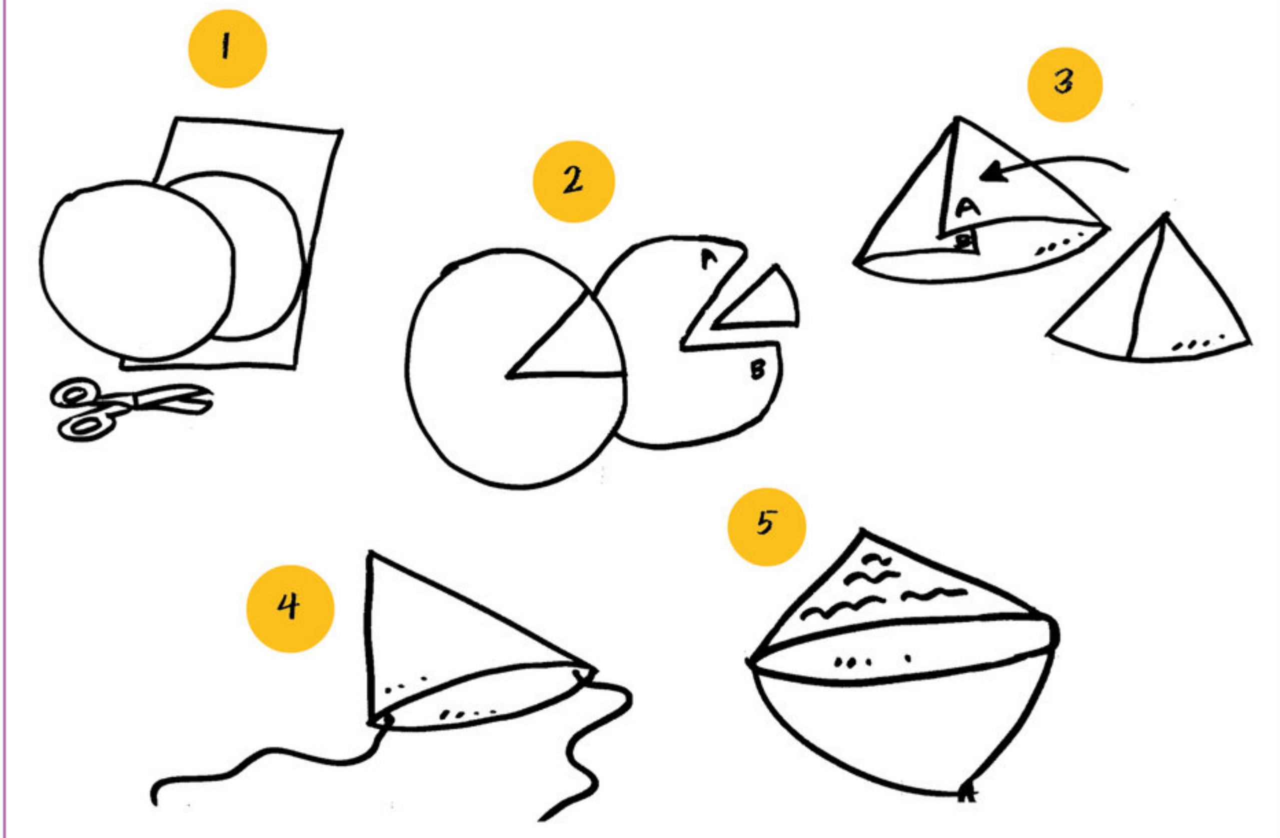
Did you notice the lovely hats that the characters in the story are wearing? These traditional hats are worn by farmers while working in the fields to protect themselves from the sun. Would you like to have one for your self? Then here’s one you can make easily.

YOU NEED:

A. sheet of chart paper (about the size of a newspaper),

B. Scissors, C. Glue,

D. Two pieces of string



HOW TO MAKE THE PAPER HAT:

1. Cut out a large circle from the chart paper.
2. Draw a ‘V’ on the circle as shown. Cut it out.
3. Overlap the cut edge (marked ‘A’) over the other (marked ‘B’) as shown. Stick them together. You will now have a conical hat.
4. Make two holes in the hat and tie the strings to them as shown.
5. There! Your hat is now ready to protect you from the sun!

Decorate your hat with fancy designs.

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Three for Free - A Folktale from Taiwan
(English)

Once upon a time, in a little village by a mountain, an old man came to sell his dumplings. He sold one for one cent, two for two cents and three for free! As the villagers started gobbling up the dumplings three at a time, strange things started happening around them. Read this tantalising tale from Taiwan to see what happened in this village by the Ban Pin Shan Mountain!

This is a Level 3 book for children who are ready to read on their own.

PRATHAM BOOKS
storyweaver